

John 14:1-14
Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 10 (and 14), 2020

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last Sunday (May 3), the faithful having been told in the new mandate that virtual worship was sufficient and that the Church *should* stay home, how fitting that the first words we heard from Scripture were these: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ doctrine and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” And then, what comfort to consider (on that Good Shepherd Sunday) that the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls promises that we shall lack nothing, but that with rod and staff, He will lead us right through the valley of the shadow of death that we may dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Today, as those words and promises of God beckon us back into the sanctuary – even if in numbers as small as those in the Upper Room – how fitting to hear the words first heard by those in that Upper Room on the night Jesus was betrayed: “Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me.”

We certainly know what it means to have hearts “troubled” in these days! How often are our hearts stirred up by the news of

this broken world all around us... agitated by the concern of illness and death, disturbed by those whose single noble objective of “defeating the virus” perhaps fails to recognize how much collateral damage their singular focus causes. Of course, in life “beyond” this pandemic: our hearts can be agitated by those who sin against us, troubled by the keen memory of how we’ve sinned against others, or anxious about the frailty of our days in this fallen world.

What our troubled hearts endure is really never anything so unique to our time. How often we’ve heard how “unprecedented” our current situation is! But doesn’t the Scripture say there is nothing new under the sun? The only “unprecedented” part of our situation is man’s reaction. But, the level-headed Church has faced pandemics (and far *worse* plagues) before; the faithful Church has faced government rigidity before, driving their worship into small groups in the catacombs; the Church has even faced the seeming defeat of her Lord ...as, the very night Jesus spoke the words of our text, He would be arrested and, in the morning, crucified. And, through it all, the Church has been led by her Noble Shepherd through the valley of the shadow of death.

And, though the Church has no reason to fear, Jesus sees her heart and knows that it is troubled and quaking. And he says, “Do not be troubled, in my Father’s house are many mansions.” Though we love that English translation, perhaps it’s not the best. The only other time that word we translate “mansions” is used in the New

Testament is later in this chapter when Jesus says that He and the Father “will come and make our *dwelling* with” the Christian. So, do not hear Jesus promise “opulent, wealthy mansions;” rather, hear “In my Father’s house are many permanent, abiding dwelling places.” In other words, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Or, as Paul says it, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

Yes, that’s the promise your crucified and risen Lord makes to you: not only was he willing to lay down his life to ransom you; not only was he powerful to take up that life again to vindicate and lead you; He’s also promised that He will never disassociate from or forsake you, His Church.

In fact, he says in our text, “I will come again and *take you to myself*.” That’s an expression of association. When Jesus comes again in his glory, he will not be ashamed of you; he will not keep his distance and pretend he doesn’t know you. Rather, he will come close-alongside you and associate with you, that wherever he is, there you will be with him. There’s nothing sin, death, and the Fall can do against such love... nothing a wolf can do when the Shepherd is so intimately associated with and dwelling among his sheep.

Now, if that’s the certain promise for the Church’s lasting inheritance, then – in our troubled hearts amid anxious times – we might ask, “How do we get there?” Jesus says, “I am the Way.” We know better the three-fold description “the Way, the Truth, and the

Life,” but notice that Jesus *first* mentions the phrase “the Way” by itself: (verse 4) “You know the way to where I am going.” Thomas answers, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Notice the pre-eminence of “the Way” – a reminder that our earthly life is not the goal, but the sojourn...that we seek a better fatherland, the *heavenly* fatherland (as Hebrews says it).

Christians who forget that we are on a sojourn by way of Jesus live with a very “present tense” focus and grow bitter and despondent in life’s difficult times and, conversely, in this life’s good times, believe they no longer *need* the gospel. But the Gospel guarantees us the Way, a promise that the Gospel is far more than this life, far more than this world... far bigger than whether we are currently living through good times or bad times. In all times, Jesus is the Way, and as the Way, He brings us to the Father and gives us the Truth and, ultimately, the Life... that Life that is forever ours as adopted children of the heavenly Father. That’s what we want... to be with the Father. That’s what will comfort and calm our troubled hearts... the comfort of a tangible relationship with the Father.

Because that’s the sinner’s desire, a funny thing happens in our text. Jesus promises the disciples that “From now on, You know the Father and have *seen* Him” (and, the word for “have seen” strongly implies “perceive/see *with the mind*” and is often translated by that Biblical declaration, “Behold!” So, “Behold – perceive the news – the virgin shall conceive” or “Behold, an angel of the Lord

appeared unto them.” So also, Jesus says, when you look upon Christ, when you learn of Christ, you also are learning of the love of the Father who sent His Son for you and for your salvation).

But, here’s the funny thing that happens in the text (and that happens among us, as well): the disciples weren’t satisfied seeing *Jesus*. They weren’t comforted having him as mediator; they wanted to see *the Father*. They just wanted a relationship with the Father! Philip says, “**Show us** the Father; put him on exhibit. Display him, and that will be sufficient.” We do the same thing, don’t we? We say, “Well, yeah, Jesus forgives my sins, but – in this situation – all I really want is to have a relationship with the Father! In this situation, I don’t want the forgiveness of sins; I want to perceive the Father comforting me, caring for my body, preserving me from trouble and *not* talking about repentance and forgiveness right now!” – sort of a therapeutic deism, isn’t it?

But, Jesus defends His intercessory role: “Philip, have I been with you so long and you do not understand that to learn of me is to be given access to the Father. What I teach you is not from myself, but from the Father.” (This is what the word Messiah/Christ implies, isn’t it?... that the One who comes has been chosen to represent the Father? To learn of Christ, then, is to learn of *the Father’s* will for you. If, somehow, you cannot believe the *words* of the Christ, then you ought at least believe the *works* of the Christ, who came to work the works of Him who sent him.

This is so essential, friends. In these times of difficulty, we often want to cling to our relationship with the Father while convincing ourselves the “extreme situation” calls us to bypass the work and words of the Christ - that Christ’s purpose of sacrifice for forgiveness and salvation really isn’t as important right now as just wanting “words of comfort.” We want the Father to love us, but in the way that we choose and by the teaching we feel is more relevant to our situation than is the teaching of the Christ the Father sent. We say, “Yes, I will believe in God. Yes, I have my faith in the Father. But Jesus’ words calling sinners to repentance “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” - that seems irrelevant in this current situation; I will put them on the back burner for a time, because all that matters right now is a relationship with the Father.” Not true. The Father’s words and will are exactly captured in the words and works of the Christ.

In a recent Ladies’ Book of Concord study, we mentioned how often people simply want to cling to faith in the Father while – favoring a therapeutic deism over the forgiveness of sins earned and distributed by the Christ. But, without the forgiveness of sins, there’s only distance between the sinner and the Father: “Your sins have separated you from your God,” Isaiah says. He doesn’t say,

“When life is tough, sin doesn’t matter, just generic love and care for your body. In good times, suddenly sin matters and God will beat you over the head to keep you from having too much fun in this world.”

That's not how Isaiah speaks, nor is it how God works. If one finds the words or works of the Christ too uncomfortable or irrelevant for life's difficult situations, he also rejects the Way to the Father. If one finds the words or works of the Christ too irrelevant or hindering for life's *good* and *carefree* situations, he also rejects the Way to the Father. In John 6, when Jesus spoke of his body being true food and his blood being true drink, many of his followers left him. And, that means, by leaving *the Way*, they also left any relationship with the Father. You cannot have a relationship with the Father while social distancing yourself from the Christ He has sent.

It is incredible to think that, here in John 14, here in the Upper Room on the very night he was betrayed, Jesus is still having to defend and explain to Thomas and Philip and to the Twelve that any desire to have "faith in God" depends solely on one's trust in the Christ the Father has sent. It's incredible, and also humbling and embarrassing, to have to admit that in both good times and bad times in *our* lives Jesus is having to defend his centrality within *our* hearts and minds as well, for we sinners just want to see the Father... "Just show me God, and I can have my own personal relationship with Him; I don't need these works of Christ, these mysteries of his gospel, Word and Sacrament... I just need my faith in the Father."

Jesus responds, "No good! That's not *the Way*. That's not the Truth. And, thus, the end result is not the Life that you seek."

And so, to reteach us, Jesus turns to the 'positive' aspect of this, and says, "The one who believes in the works I am doing now, that one will also do them (in other words, that one has a share in everything that I do... my death is their death, my resurrection is their resurrection, my Baptism is their Baptism, my Keys to the Kingdom will be their keys to the kingdom, my body and blood as true food and true drink will be their true food and true drink.)"

Yes, we have a share in everything Christ does, and - because He has gone to the Father – these works of His in which we are blessed with a share are even more glorious than the miracles He did while walking the earth: Giving sight to the blind pales in comparison to making an infant a child of the Light. Making the lame to walk pales in comparison to forgiving your sins. Raising Lazarus from the grave to one day die again pales in comparison to the resurrection of the life that He has already stored away as your inheritance so that you will never die in the eternal age.

Thus, as our text concludes, you may ask anything in the name of the Son (meaning according to the work and revealed Word and will of the Christ) and it will be done for you because it is in keeping with the will of the Father. What glory is brought to the Father when we solely and utterly and joyfully depend on the Christ whom the Father has sent. Therefore, in good times and in bad times... in life's easy days and difficult days... call upon the Christ. Depend upon His works. Rejoice that He has so graciously brought

you anew to the forgiveness of sins in His Word and Sacraments. Live and pray in faith of this One whom the Father has sent. For this Christ is the Way; and as the Way, His redemptive works and revealed Word will bring you into all Truth, and with that - will usher you to everlasting Life... a permanent and abiding dwelling with the Father in the inheritance Christ has gone ahead to prepare for you.

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
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